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Activities of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, including coordination matters

Activities of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme

Seventh session of the World Urban Forum

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present report summarizes the issues discussed at the seventh session of the World Urban Forum, held in Medellin, Colombia, from 5 to 11 April 2014, together with the declaration adopted by the Forum at that session. The full report of the seventh session is set out in a note by the secretariat (HSP/GC/25/INF/3).

I. Introduction

1. The World Urban Forum is the world's premier conference on urban issues. It was established by the United Nations to examine one of the most pressing issues facing the world today: rapid urbanization and its impact on communities, cities, economies, climate change and policies. The Forum is organized and convened by the Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) pursuant to paragraph 10 of resolution 18/5 of the Commission on Human Settlements, in which the Commission requested the Executive Director to promote a merger of the Urban Environment Forum and the International Forum on Urban Poverty into a new urban forum, with a view to strengthening the coordination of international support to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Subsequently, the General Assembly decided, in its resolution 56/206, that the Forum would be a non-legislative technical forum in which experts could exchange views in the years when the Governing Council of UN-Habitat did not meet. In paragraph 7 of its resolution 56/205, the Assembly encouraged local authorities and other Habitat Agenda partners to participate, as appropriate, in the Forum in its role as an advisory body to the Executive Director of UN-Habitat.

2. The Forum is held in a different host city and country biennially, drawing a wide range of experts from every walk of life. The inclusive nature of the Forum, combined with high-level participation, makes it a unique United Nations conference and the premier international gathering on urban issues.

3. Participants in the Forum include, but are not limited to, the so-called Habitat Agenda partners and constituency groups, including national Governments, local authorities, members of national, regional and international associations of local governments, Global Parliamentarians on Habitat, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, media organizations, human settlements professionals, research institutions and academies of science, professional associations, the

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private sector, business and non-profit sectors, foundations, relevant United Nations organizations and other international agencies.

4. The Forum, promoting the strong participation of Habitat Agenda partners and relevant international programmes, funds and agencies, and thus ensuring their inclusion in the identification of new issues, has a threefold objective which includes: (a) improving the collective knowledge of sustainable urban development through the sharing of lessons learned and the exchange of best practices and good policies; (b) increasing coordination and cooperation within and between different stakeholders and constituencies for the advancement and implementation of the Habitat Agenda; and (c) raising awareness of sustainable urbanization among stakeholders and constituencies (including the general public).

5. The Forum is also intended to re-examine on a cyclical basis and feed into the strategy and work of UN-Habitat and its partners in order to improve their effectiveness and relevance. New ideas and working models are identified in the Forum, are fed into the strategic plan of UN-Habitat and form part of the subsequent work programme.

6. Overall attendance at the various sessions of the Forum rose from 1,200 at the inaugural session in Nairobi in 2002 to more than 4,300 in Barcelona, Spain, in 2004 and to more than 10,400 in Vancouver, Canada, in 2006. In Nanjing, China, in 2008, there were 8,000 participants, while the number of participants reached almost 13,800 at the fifth session, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2010 and 8,200 at the sixth session, in Naples, Italy, in 2012. The seventh session of the World Urban Forum, held in Medellin, Colombia, in April 2014 brought together over 23,000 attendees from 142 countries.

7. The third session of the Forum, held in Vancouver in 2006, focused on sustainable urbanization and inclusive cities. One of the messages of the Forum was that the urban population of developing countries was set to double from 2 billion to 4 billion in the subsequent 30 years. That would require the equivalent planning, financing and servicing facilities needed for a new city of 1 million people to be built every week for the subsequent 30 years.

8. The theme of the fourth session of the Forum, held in Nanjing in 2008, was "Harmonious urbanization". At that session, it was made clear that a society could not be harmonious if large sections of its population were deprived of basic needs while other sections lived in opulence. An important message from that session of the Forum was that harmony in cities could not be achieved if the price of urban living was paid by the environment. The concept of harmony entails the synchronization and integration of all the Earth's assets: physical, environmental, cultural, historical, social or human.

9. The fifth session of the Forum was held in Rio de Janeiro, the second-largest city in Brazil, and built upon the technical and substantive lessons of the previous four sessions. It focused on the theme "Right to the city: bridging the urban divide". The Forum shared perspectives and viewpoints on the relevance of that concept, identifying what was needed to bridge the urban divide and to facilitate a prompt and sustainable transition from a partially inclusive city to a fully inclusive one.

10. The sixth session of the Forum, held in Naples, had as its main theme "The urban future", a broad theme that encouraged reflections on the current and future challenges of our cities. Participants identified initiatives and commitments that could be effectively implemented to shape the cities of the future to be more democratic, just, sustainable and humane.

11. Since its first session, the Forum has significantly improved its results-oriented approach, identifying clearly focused objectives and measurable indicators of success, designing conducive event formats and strengthening the reporting mechanisms to effectively collect the substantive outcomes of the Forum.

II. Overview of the seventh session

12. The seventh session of the World Urban Forum, held in Medellin from 5 to 11 April 2014, was organized and convened by the Executive Director of UN-Habitat in collaboration with the Government of Colombia and the municipality of Medellin.

13. The city of Medellin was selected as a result of an open bidding process and announced as host city of the seventh session of the Forum during the closing ceremony of the sixth session of the Forum.

14. The city was the perfect setting for the seventh session of the Forum, given its experience of the urban transformation that it had undertaken in the previous decade to overcome the huge problems that had caused it to be labelled in the relatively recent past as one of the most dangerous and socially

divided cities. In fact the city of Medellin was a powerful demonstration of the positive change that can be achieved through good urban planning and programming in a relatively short time.

15. Based on the principle of bringing the Forum to the citizens, a number of events were organized in the city, including field visits to areas of the city where innovative projects had been successfully implemented.

16. The main theme of the seventh session was "Urban equity in development: cities for life". Participants discussed the subject in the light of concerns about growing inequalities at all levels around the world through the various sessions at the Forum, considering how to integrate urban equity effectively into the development agenda with a view to ensuring a sustainable transformative change in an increasingly urbanized world.

17. The seventh session of the Forum assumed a relevant role and significance against the backdrop of the ongoing debate on the post-2015 development agenda and the sustainable development goals. The subject was debated at many events, where participants supported the idea of sustainable urban development being more centrally positioned in the post-2015 development agenda, together with an urban sustainable development goal.

18. The process leading to the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in 2016, which will deliberate on a new urban agenda for the next 20 years, was complemented by the discussions on the post-2015 development agenda and permeated the majority of the debates. The Forum constituted an extremely valuable opportunity to gather substantive inputs and coordinated international support for a new transformative urban agenda anchored to the outcomes of the post-2015 development agenda, including the sustainable development goals.

19. The overall participation of the United Nations system, including at the high-level inter-agency special session, with the participation of several United Nations agencies and programmes, was an opportunity to strengthen collective knowledge and coordination and cooperation in the United Nations system at the urban level. The session registered significant progress ahead of Habitat III. A total of 39 United Nations agencies were represented at the Forum in Medellin.

20. The World Urban Campaign asserted itself as a synergetic and inclusive platform to mobilize stakeholders for Habitat III. The consensus document called "The city we need", launched just before the Forum, is set to constitute a basis for the substantive contribution of stakeholders to the Habitat III process.

21. From the debates during the week of the Forum, the concern of all constituencies about the unsustainability of the current urban sprawl, the diminishing of densities and the progressive consumption of arable land as a result of unplanned urbanization was clear. That trend has to be rectified, especially because in the next 30 or 40 years, 3 billion more people will be urbanized.

22. The Forum exhibited a broad consensus on the need for good and inclusively designed urban policies, driven by the notion of equity, to elaborate urban plans for all levels and sizes of cities, allocating adequate public space and well-connected buildable plots, making them accessible and affordable to all citizens in the realization of the principle of the right to the city.

23. The seventh session of the Forum was attended by 22,038 people from 142 countries, the highest number of participants in any session of the Forum. That demonstrates the clear growing focus on cities as formidable drivers for sustainable development. However, that number of participants was also made possible thanks to the great interest and warm welcome from the host city and country.

24. Of the 22,038 people registered, 4,008 were in the workforce and 18,030 were participants, of whom approximately 3 out of every 10 were international participants. In all, 38 of the 49 least developed countries were represented at the session.

25. Of the 18,030 participants, 89.82 per cent were taking part for the first time in a session of the Forum.

26. Participants from the academia and research group again accounted for the highest percentage of participants. However, other groups, such as local and regional authorities, civil society organizations, the private sector, foundations and the media, also saw a significant growth in their numbers.

27. The Forum offered an impressive range of events, responding to the thematic and specific demands of all types of urban stakeholders, including the general public. The programme of the session featured more than 500 events.

28. In addition to the main theme of the Forum, six substantive sub-themes were identified, addressing specific aspects of urban development. They were discussed during the six dialogues organized as principal elements of the Forum, which included interaction with the audience, and were focused on the following themes: "Urban equity in development law", "Urban planning and design for social cohesion", "Basic services: local businesses for equitable cities", "Innovative financing instruments for local authorities", "Raising standards for urban resilience" and "A safe city as a just and equitable city".

29. The speakers in the dialogues were selected for their quality and to ensure a regional and gender balance, as well as a variety of perspectives from different partner groups, including academia, the private sector, national and local authorities and civil society. Speakers from the least developed countries were also encouraged to participate and received support in that regard.

30. Another important element of the main programme of the Forum was the holding of the three assemblies of youth, gender and women and business, integrated for the first time into the Forum. The first children's assembly was also held, which saw over 200 children from the Latin American region gathered to reflect on and discuss their experiences of living in a city, and share their ideas and thoughts on urban vulnerabilities and how to influence decision makers.

31. During the week of the Forum, the 11 main constituencies of the Habitat Agenda held their respective round-table meetings to discuss and deliberate on their specific views and positions vis-à-vis the preparation process for, and expected outcomes of, Habitat III.

32. Nine special sessions were held, addressing traditional and emerging subjects relevant to the urban agenda. As in previous sessions of the Forum, three special sessions were organized and conducted by the host country, province and city respectively, during which participants took the opportunity to articulate their challenges and visions, showcasing a wide range of initiatives at both the policy and intervention levels.

33. For the first time, the format of the Forum was enriched with an important results-oriented innovation, with plenary conclusions meetings organized every day to summarize and debate the conclusions of that day's round tables and special sessions. That innovation provided the audience with the opportunity to learn about and discuss issues debated in meetings that they were unable to not attend. Summaries of those conclusions were posted the same day on the web page of the Forum.

34. As a result of an online call for applications, 156 networking events and 38 side events were selected, based on the quality and relevance of the subjects and ensuring adequate regional and thematic balance in the programme. That segment of the programme is traditionally among the most appreciated by a variety of stakeholders and, through an effective reporting system, provides an amazing wealth of substantive inputs to UN-Habitat and stakeholders.

35. A total of 30 training events were organized for 1,607 people, 789 of whom were women. As a central segment of the forum and a major contributor to enhancing knowledge and transferring best practices, they covered a wide range of topics directly related to the core theme of the Forum. Some were closely focused on particular themes, such as social urbanism and urban planning, land and housing, urban equity and slum upgrading, sustainable urban development, climate change and ecocity systems, while other addressed cross-cutting issues, including gender and urban inequality, youth and territorial identity, and safer cities, human rights and the right to the city.

36. An international exhibition area, with a total of 103 exhibitors from 37 countries spread over 11,000 m^2 and visited by more than 37,000 visitors, was among the liveliest spaces at the Forum. Many networking activities took place in it, allowing participants and exhibitors to initiate new partnerships and share experiences and good practices.

37. The exhibition area included a UN-Habitat pavilion, where participants could meet representatives of UN-Habitat and get to know about the mandate and work of the Programme. The pavilion displayed a visual representation of the challenges and opportunities associated with cities and the approaches proposed by UN-Habitat. That advocacy tool was appreciated in particular for the clarity of the messages communicated through the simple language of drawings.

38. A "One United Nations" room, symbolically set up at the entrance to the Forum exhibition, and designed according to the traditional knowledge of Colombian indigenous peoples, was an opportunity for numerous United Nations agencies to meet participants and share approaches and initiatives at the urban level, enriching the Forum programme and flagging up the collaborative spirit of this unique United Nations conference.

39. The Agora Room and the City Changers Room hosted another significant batch of interesting events, related to initiatives undertaken by UN-Habitat and its partners, covering all geographic areas and a range of thematics related to sustainable urban development.

40. An urban library was made available to the participants to consult all kinds of information on the latest publications, in both hard copy and digital formats. The library hosted presentations and book signings of new publications and research by prominent urban experts and academics.

41. The second edition of the Urban Cinema featured more than 50 events attended by 1,700 participants exploring the urban environment and its dynamics through the use of the appealing language of video filming.

42. During the month before the event, an e-debate was hosted on the URB.im network platform, thanks to a partnership between the Ford Foundation and UN-Habitat. The online platform was a useful tool for discussing topics and ideas related to the main theme of the Forum, "Urban equity in development: cities for life". Conclusions from those talks were used to further feed the final version of the concept paper of the seventh session of the Forum.

43. As an important innovation of the main programme format, three "urban talks" sessions took place in the Teatro Metropolitano and were broadcast live at prime time from 6.30 p.m. to 7.30 p.m. The urban talks featured the participation of well-known architects and urban specialists, including Leon Krier, Brendt Toderian and Richard Florida, as well as Nobel laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz. The urban talks were among the highlights of the seventh edition of the Forum and contributed to further expanding the target audience in search of a heightened awareness of urban issues.

44. The Forum website acted as an effective advocacy and awareness platform, as well as an excellent source of information through links to the details of the programme, including all the available pre-session documents. After its launch in February 2014, the website (www.unhabitat.org/wuf) attracted 180,799 users (42,115 during the week of the Forum) for a total 292,955 sessions (65,468 during the Forum).

45. In addition to the participants at the venue in Medellin, a huge number of people followed the implementation and proceedings of the Forum in different ways. Interested individuals and groups followed the main sessions through United Nations Web TV, where the Forum page was viewed 5,619 times and was the seventh most viewed page on the website.

46. The dynamic participation through social media in the Forum confirmed the trend since social media was first introduced at the sixth session in 2012. A total of 8,649 fans of facebook.com/worldurbanforum were recorded, while on Twitter in April, the hashtag #WUF7 had a collective reach to 62,878,900 people and 79,508 total unique tweets between January and April 2014. On Instagram, #WUF7 got 5,361 submissions between January and May 2014.

47. Another relevant innovation to increase and facilitate networking at the Forum was the introduction of the #ourWUF social network platform, which had a total of 2,810 users and more than 7,000 interactions among participants. The new tool was found to be effective and facilitated a good number of new partnerships and business contacts.

48. The ad hoc blog "Together for Habitat III" provided an excellent online platform where ideas for a new urban agenda were gathered in the move forward together for Habitat III.

49. As a confirmation of the increased relevance and popularity of the Forum vis-à-vis the objective to position urban issues centrally on the political and media agenda, a growing number of media were accredited at the seventh session, generating 20 press conferences during the event and a huge number of press releases.

50. In addition, and in line with the above-mentioned objective, an "urban journalism academy" took place at the Forum, featuring lectures from the most reputable urban journalists and media experts around the world, for participants to learn how to communicate competently and effectively on urban issues.

51. The presence of the Forum in both online and paper contributions was also encouraging. Articles appeared in several important international newspapers and magazines, including the *Financial Times* (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), *La Presse* (Canada), *El Pais* (Spain), *Vanity Fair* (United States of America), *The Guardian* (United Kingdom) and *The Economist* (United Kingdom); in broadcasts by Deutsche Welle (Germany) and Al-Jazeera (Qatar); and in almost all of the most widely read newspapers in the Latin American region and, in particular, Colombia. Searches on Google aggregated news from over 25,000 publishers and media houses worldwide gave a result of more than 1,000 web stories on the Forum.

52. Important promotional and mobilization activities at both the global and country level were carried out before the Forum. National urban forums, plus other regional activities and events, were implemented in coordination with the UN-Habitat regional and country offices in all regions. National urban forums were held, among others, in Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Ghana, Kenya and Malawi. Similar urban advocacy events took place at the national level in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Haiti and Zimbabwe. Other substantive events took place in the United States, in Philadelphia and New York, hosted by the University of Pennsylvania and the Ford Foundation, respectively.

53. The background paper and concept notes for all the main sessions of the programme were made available online in English, French and Spanish as the main substantive pre-session documents, beginning six months before the conference was held.

III. Medellin Declaration

54. As an immediate outcome of the Forum, the Medellin Declaration provides general recommendations emerging from the wealth of substantive debates held at the Forum, around which a substantial consensus was reached.

A. Equity as a foundation of sustainable urban development

55. The participants in the seventh session of the Forum – Governments, the private sector, international organizations, academia, professionals and civil society – reaffirmed their commitment to integrating urban equity into the development agenda, employing all means and resources available to ensure that cities are transformed into inclusive, safe, prosperous and harmonious spaces for all. Participants also made a commitment to taking action, as a matter of urgency, collectively and individually, to bring the benefits of sustainable urban development to all.

56. They also committed themselves to advancing that vision and to promoting equitable urban development in their communities, towns, cities and countries.

B. The city as opportunity

57. Since 2008, the majority of the world's population has lived in cities. Today, urban areas are a living combination of history, civilization, diversity and culture. Urbanization has been a force that has changed almost everything: ways of thinking and acting, ways of using space, lifestyles, social and economic relations and consumption and production patterns. Cities, as economic and productive innovation spaces, provide opportunities for improving access to resources and services, as well as options in the social, legal, economic, cultural and environmental fields. Urbanization has ushered in economic growth, development and prosperity for many.

58. However, cities are also spaces where multidimensional poverty, environmental degradation, and vulnerability to disasters and the impact of climate change are present. Today, more than two thirds of the global population live in cities with greater levels of inequality than 20 years ago. Participants acknowledged the notable efforts under way to ensure that urban places can overcome the challenges to sustainable and inclusive development. While recognizing and commending those efforts, they agreed that much work remained to be done.

59. Participants acknowledged that when equity was an integral part of the development agenda, the deep structural problems and challenges of cities could be better addressed. Equity was both a moral obligation and a central element of social justice and became part of transformative change.

C. New urban agenda

60. Participants highlighted the need to promote a new urban agenda that could overcome the challenge of the lack of an adequate legal framework and planning system, which leads to the relentless expansion of cities, intensive energy use, alarming and dangerous climate change impacts, multiple forms of inequality and exclusion and increased difficulties in providing decent work for all. That agenda should promote an urbanization model that is people-centred, based on "cities for life".

61. The new urban agenda requires new technologies, reliable urban data and integrated, participatory planning approaches to respond both to present challenges and the emerging needs of the cities of the future.

62. Participants acknowledged that there were many models of urbanization that responded to the diverse cultural, institutional and social conditions of countries and cities. In that context, they observed that the new urban agenda should:

(a) Encourage Governments to develop and use methods, such as national urban plans and policies, that link current urban development with future needs and are solidly grounded in the fundamental principles of equity, justice and human rights;

(b) Advance greater social cohesion and break down social divides, promoting equity through empowering all segments of society, particularly women, youth and indigenous peoples;

(c) Promote participatory and inclusive local governance that empowers all inhabitants; recognize the key contributions of various levels of government, including at the regional, subregional and municipal levels; strengthen formal coordination mechanisms; define joint responsibilities; and provide each level of government with the necessary resources and incentives to carry out their respective roles effectively;

(d) Promote sustainable urban development, based on urban planning that promotes youth participation, gender equality and balanced territorial development; strengthened resilience to climate change and natural disasters; the upgrading and prevention of slums; the provision of housing, basic services and security of land tenure; access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport; and access to safe public spaces and services for all;

(e) Promote the active and committed participation of the private sector, civil society, including grassroots communities, and other constituencies, through partnerships, to ensure broad-based economic and social development, in order to reduce poverty and create jobs for all.

D. Contributing to the future

1. Sustainable urbanization in the post-2015 development agenda

63. The framework of the post-2015 development agenda is an opportunity to reaffirm the universal relevance of well-planned and managed cities as real drivers for change. To that end, the participants in the Forum reaffirmed the need to include key aspects of sustainable cities and human settlements in the post-2015 development agenda, in order to harness the transformational power of cities to achieve and advance sustainable development.

2. Contributing to the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III)

64. Discussions at the seventh session of the Forum made an important contribution to preparations for Habitat III, which was seen as a unique opportunity to develop a new urban agenda that would contribute to harnessing urbanization as a positive force for present and future generations and to advancing the quest for equity and shared prosperity. To that end, participants recognized the World Urban Campaign as a participatory process and partnership platform among the actors of change working to ensure an inclusive and encompassing process in the lead-up to Habitat III.

3. World Urban Forum

65. Participants in the seventh session of the Forum recognized the unique and positive role that the Forum plays as a space for effective dialogue. They commended the efforts of the city of Medellin, the Government of Colombia and UN-Habitat for organizing the innovative and inclusive Forum. They reaffirmed their support for the World Urban Forum process and committed to providing continued cooperation to the next hosts as they shouldered the challenge of preparing for the next Forum.